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Archaeological Test Trenching Report

Three Trouts, Charlesland Co.Wicklow
Licence 20E0152 and 20R0054

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1. Summary

This archaeological report details the results of archaeological test trenching (Licence 20E0152) and metal detection survey (Licence 20R0054) at the site of a proposed development by Wicklow County Council at Three Trouts, Charlesland, Co. Wicklow (ITM 729109/710525).

Wicklow County Council have submitted a Part 8 planning application for 34 no. houses and associated site works. An archaeological impact assessment report was prepared by Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd in 2019 and submitted with the Part 8 application. Further archaeological assessment in the form of test trenching was recommended given the ground conditions were unsuitable for geophysical survey.

This strategy was carried out in order to determine the presence/absence of archaeological remains so that an appropriate archaeological mitigation strategy could be applied in advance of any construction works should sub surface archaeology survive within the proposed development area.

The test trenching was completed over two days in March 2020 and no finds or features of archaeological significance were identified. The trenches were excavated by a 14 tonne tracked machine with flat grading bucket under the archaeological supervision of the licence holder Yvonne Whitty plus an archaeological assistant. An archaeological impact and mitigation section is also contained within this report which recommends no further archaeological mitigation is necessary for the development to proceed.

2. Location

The proposed development area consists of a large open field under rough pasture, 1.4km east of the village of Delgany (Figures 1-2, Plates 1-6). It is located in the townland of Charlesland and its northern boundary which is defined by the Three Trouts Stream is also the boundary between Charlesland and Killincarrig. This boundary is also a parish (Kilcoole/Delgany) and barony boundary (Newcastle/Rathdown) (Figure 3). The Sugarloaf and Irish Sea are visible from the site (Plate 7).

The proposed development site is a sub rectangular shaped field under rough pasture which slopes moderately from the south where the ground is highest to the north towards the Three Trouts Stream. The northern boundary adjacent the stream is defined by dense overgrowth (Plates 2 and 5). The site is bound to the north and south by housing developments and to the west by a green field site and east by landscaped grounds associated with the housing developments.



Figure 1: Site location Three Trouts, Charlesland County Wicklow.



Plate 1: Aerial view site location outlined in red Three Trouts, Charlesland, County Wicklow.



Plate 2: View along northern boundary of site facing northeast, note dense hedging and overgrowth.



Plate 3: View southwest from site entrance at Burnaby Lawns across Three Trouts Stream.



Plate 4: Northwest corner of site adjoined by Burnaby Court, note mature trees in northeast corner of the site at Three Trouts, Delgany, County Wicklow.



Plate 5: View from northwest corner of the proposed development site along the northern boundary.



Plate 6: View east along southern boundary of proposed development site at Three Trouts, Charlesland, County Wicklow.



Plate 7: Landscape surrounding site at Three Trouts, Charlesland, County Wicklow.

In antiquity the site would have had clear views of the Sugarloaf, little Sugarloaf and the Irish Sea (Plate 7). A shed visible on aerial photography is no longer extant (Plate 1).

3. Description of Development



Figure 2: Site layout at Three Trouts, Charlesland, County Wicklow.

The proposed Part 8 planning application is for 34 no. houses and associated site works (Figure 2). The area adjacent to the Three Trouts Stream will be undeveloped, however test trenching of this area was completed given the archaeologically sensitive location adjacent the stream.

4. Archaeological Background

The proposed development area consists of a large open field under rough pasture, 1.4km east of the village of Delgany (Figures 1, Plates 1-6). It is located in the townland of Charlesland and its northern boundary which is defined by the Three Trouts Stream is also the boundary between Charlesland and Killincarrig (Figure 3). Furthermore, the stream is also a parish and barony boundary highlighting the historical significance of the site. Gaelic land ownership required a clear definition of territories for each sept and a need for strong permanent fences around their territories. Townland boundaries along ridge-tops, streams, or bogs are more likely to be older in date than those composed of straight lines. Christianity introduced the system of parish boundaries, whilst Anglo Normans introduced baronies and counties.

The desktop assessment completed in 2019 by IAC details the historical and archaeological background of the proposed development and confirms the archaeological potential of the site. The following paragraph is an extract from this report:

“The proposed development area is located within an agricultural field in the townland of Charlesland in County Wicklow. There are no recorded monuments within the study area, the nearest consists of Killincarrig Castle (WI013-005) c. 800m to the northwest. However, there are ten sites listed on the sites and monuments record within the study area. These sites were discovered during archaeological excavations to the south of the proposed development during the construction of the Charlesland residential development. Of the twenty archaeological investigations only two did not produce anything of archaeological significance, the remainder produced evidence of activity from the Early Neolithic to the medieval period. A number of the sites discovered remained in use from the prehistoric to the medieval period, however, the main period of activity dated from the Middle to Late Bronze Age.” (Waters, 2019).

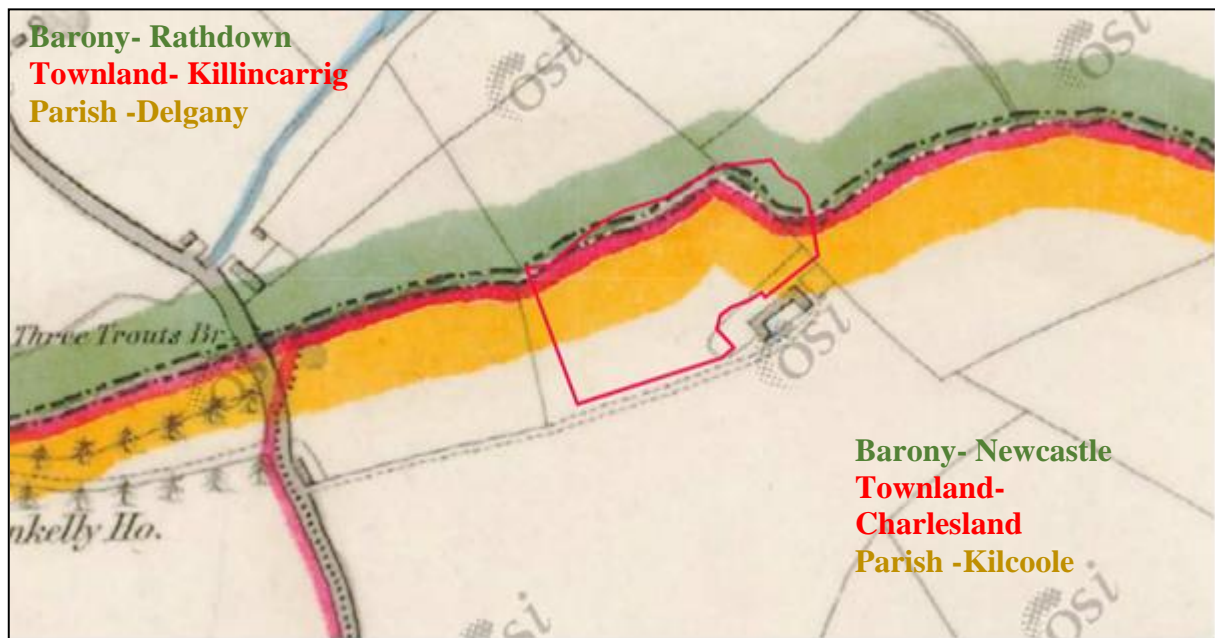


Figure 3: Site location outlined in red with barony, townland and parish boundaries illustrated.

The residential development in Charlesland which adjoins the site under discussion exposed fourteen archaeological sites which were excavated between 2001-2004 (Figure 4). These excavations confirmed substantial settlement in the Bronze Age. However continuous occupation of the landscape in Charlesland ranged from the Early Neolithic to the medieval period. The sites in the immediate vicinity of the site are discussed in the following table and are illustrated in Figure 4 below.

SMR NO.	TOWNLAND	CLASSIFICATION	DISTANCE FROM SCHEME
WI013-098	Charlesland	Kiln - corn-drying	c. 70m east
WI013-097	Charlesland	Excavation -	c. 110m south
WI013-071	Charlesland	Fulacht fiadh	c. 270m east
WI013-076	Charlesland	Habitation site	c. 200m south

Table 1: SMR sites within 200m of development site.

The closest site WI013-098, a cereal-drying kiln was excavated under Licence 04E0118. WI013-097, a habitation site is 110m to the south of the development site (Figure 4). It was defined by a series of pits, post holes, stake holes, hearths, troughs and burnt spreads which were uncovered during topsoil stripping in 2004.

A burnt mound site WI013-071 was excavated 270m east of the development site and contained a wood and wattle lined trough. Four shallow pits were located to the north of the trough (Figure 4).

A habitation site WI013-076 was excavated 200m to the south of the site under discussion which comprised the following features; two Bronze Age mortuary structures defined by a ring of post holes which contained cremated bone and Bronze Age pottery, three linear ditches were located at the eastern extent of the site forming a probable enclosure with an east-facing entrance. A large number of associated pits, post-holes, hearths and a possible metallised surface were also excavated and yielded a fragment of bronze, Early Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery and six saddle querns (Figure 4). Two kilns were also excavated and a rotary quern was found in the larger one.



Figure 4: SMR sites within 300m of the proposed development site.

Additionally, the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of the Four Masters mention the great slaughter of Sitric, son of Olaf and the Danes of Dublin by Ugaire, King of Leinster. Sitric is believed to have been en-route to a second attack on Glendalough when he was embattled by Ugaire at Delgany. The exact location of this battle is the subject of some speculation however it is suggested that it may have occurred somewhere along the valley of the Three Trout's stream.

5. Test Trenching Results

A total of eleven test trenches approximately 600m in length were excavated at Charlesland (Licence 20E0152, 20R0054) (Figure 5, Plates 8-13). The trenches were excavated at 15m intervals and covered the entire footprint of the development and all associated site works. Test trenching was completed to ensure that if archaeological features were encountered their nature and extent would be known at an early stage so that an appropriate archaeological mitigation could be applied in consultation with National Monuments Service and the National Museum of Ireland.

The test trenches were excavated by a tracked machine using a flat grading bucket under the archaeological supervision of the licence holder. The topsoil from the trenches was metal detected by an archaeological assistant for artefact retrieval under Licence 20R0054. Once the trenches were excavated and recorded, they were back filled by machine.

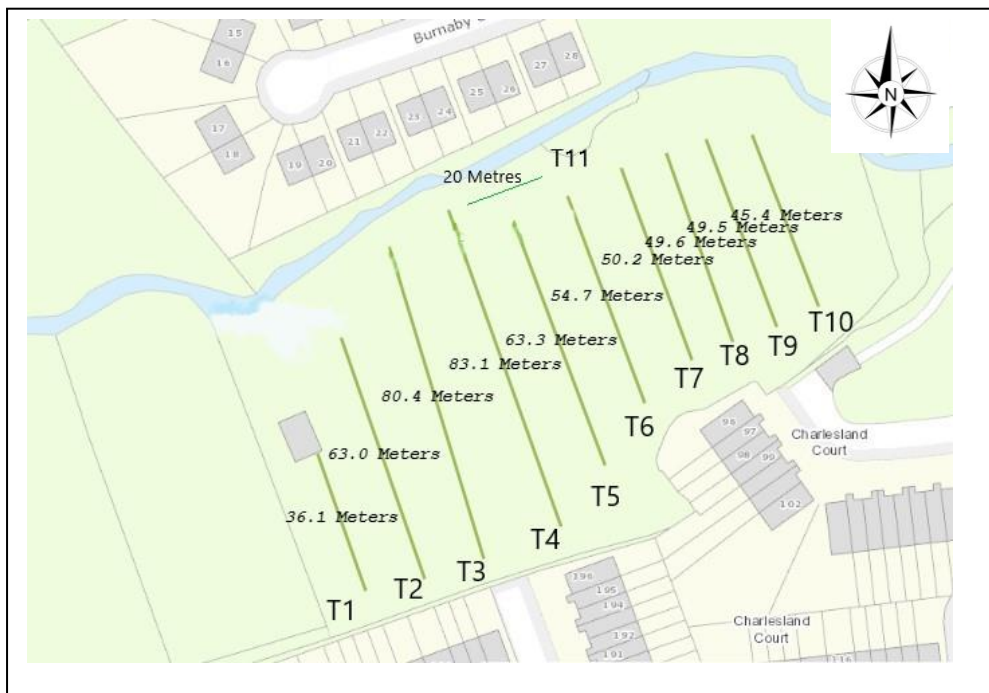


Figure 5: Test trench layout, Three Trouts, Delgany, Co. Wicklow.

The ground was highest in the northeast corner and it fell moderately to the south towards the Three Trouts stream (Plates 2 and 4). The topsoil was consistent across the site and comprised a dark brown silty clay which varied in depth from 0.35m on average at the southern end of the field to over 1m in the centre of the site where there was a natural hollow in the ground (where Trenches 1–6 were excavated) (Figure 5, Plate 13). At the north-eastern end of the site the topsoil was on average 0.50m in depth.

The natural geology was well draining across the site. At the southern end of the site where the ground was highest it comprised loose gravels derived from sandstone and quartzite (Plates 9 and 10). As the ground sloped the north towards the stream it comprised a mid-orange yellow silty sand. There was evidence of flooding at the northern end of the site adjacent the stream where the natural ground was light grey in colour indicating a flood event (Plate 13, Trench 11). No finds or features of archaeological significance were exposed in any of the test trenches as summarized in the table below.

Trench No.	Length	Depth	Orientation	Archaeology	Plate
1	36m	0.62m-1.20m	NW-SE	None	8
2	63m	0.60m-1.20m	NW-SE	None	8
3	80m	0.60m-1m	NW-SE	None	9
4	83m	0.55m-1.10m	NW-SE	None	9
5	63m	0.55m-1.10m	NW-SE	None	10 and 13
6	54m	0.70m	NW-SE	None	10
7	50m	0.60m	NW-SE	None	11
8	50m	0.50m	NW-SE	None	11
9	50m	0.55m	NW-SE	None	12
10	45m	0.45m	NW-SE	None	12
11	20m	0.45m	NW-SE	None	13

Table 2: Test Trench summary.



Plate 8: Trenches 1 and 2 facing northwest.



Plate 9: Trench 3 facing southeast and Trench 4 southeast end with gravels.



Plate 10: Trench 5 facing southeast and Trench 6 southeast end of the trench with gravels.



Plate 11: Trench 7 southeast end, Trench 8 facing southwest.



Plate 12: Trenches 9 and 10 facing northwest.



Plate 13: Trench 11 facing east and Trench 5 topsoil depth.

6. Impact Assessment and Archaeological Mitigation

The desk based assessment for the proposed development in the townland of Charlesland in County Wicklow found that although there are no recorded monuments within the study area the potential for archaeology to be encountered was very high.

The residential development in Charlesland which adjoins the site under discussion exposed fourteen archaeological sites which were excavated between 2001 and 2004. These excavations confirmed substantial settlement in the Bronze Age. The proposed development site adjacent to the Three Trouts Stream would have been a favourable location for Bronze Age activities in particular for burnt mound archaeological sites, the closest was 110m south of the subject site. No such activity was visible in any of the test trenches and it is the authors opinion that the ground conditions were unsuitable as the natural geology which comprised gravels and sand did not hold water for such activities. The main purpose of burnt mound sites was to boil water which was used for a variety of purposes including cooking, dyeing and bathing. The water was heated by placing hot stones into a water filled trough. Once the water heating process was complete the trough was cleaned out and the stones were cast aside giving rise to the characteristic shaped burnt mounds.

The retrieval of artefacts by illegal metal detectorists although some distance from the site nevertheless indicated the potential for artefact retrieval. Metal detection of the topsoil excavated from all the test trenches was completed under Licence 20R0054, however no artefacts were recovered.

Furthermore documentary sources reference a possible Viking Battle in the vicinity of the Three Trouts stream which forms the northern boundary of the site. This stream is a townland, parish and barony boundary, thus highlighting the historic significance of the site. Christianity introduced the system of parish boundaries, whilst Anglo Normans introduced baronies and counties. The townland system however formed the basis of these new geographical administrative units. The earliest reference to the townland Charlesland is in 1619.

Given the archaeological potential of the site the results of the test trenching were surprising. No finds or features of archaeological significance were exposed in any of the test trenches nor any artefacts retrieved from the metal detection survey. It is apparent based on the results of the test trenching and metal detection survey that the archaeological activity was concentrated on higher ground to the south as evidenced by the sites uncovered during the Charlesland housing development.

Having taken into account the results of the desk based impact assessment, metal detection survey and test trenching it is the author's opinion that no further archaeological mitigation is required in order for the development to proceed. The proposed development will not impact upon any previously unrecorded finds or features of archaeological significance.

These recommendations are the professional opinion of the writer and based upon the findings of the desktop assessment, metal detection survey and test trenching. All archaeological recommendations are subject to further consultation and agreement with The National Monuments Section of the Department of the Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The following guides and legislation were considered when compiling this report;

- Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and National Heritage, 1972
- Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe, (the 'Granada Convention') ratified by Ireland in 1997
- European Convention Concerning the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (the 'Valetta Convention') ratified by the Republic of Ireland in 1997

- Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, 1999, Department of the Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands
- Heritage Act, 1995
- National Monuments Act, 1930, as amended 1954, 1987 and 2004
- Wicklow County Development Plan 2016–2022

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